

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Favorable reconsideration of this application in light of the following discussion is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-9, 11-13, 19, and 24-30 are pending in this application, Claims 10, 14-18, and 20-23 have been previously cancelled without prejudice. Claims 24 and 29 have been presently amended, and Claim 30 has been added. No new matter was added.

In the Office Action, Claim 29 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention. Claims 24 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Hughes (U.S. Patent No 4,981,408) in view of Kitsunai (JP 6100614). Claim 25-27 and 29 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Hughes and Kitsunai, and further in view of Miller (U.S. Patent No. 5,417,537). Claims 1-9, 11-13, and 19 were indicated as being allowed.

Applicant acknowledges with appreciation the indication of allowance for Claims 1-9, 11-13, and 19.

Amendments to the Claims

Claim 24 has been amended to more clearly define the subject matter of the present invention. The newly added limitations of Claim 24 are supported by page 26, line 7 to page 27, line 14, in general and by page 27, lines 5-14, in particular. Further, Claim 30 has been newly added. Claim 30 is supported by page 22, line 25 to page 23, line 2 and page 26, lines 9-12.

Regarding the 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, rejection

Claim 29 has been amended as suggested in the Office Action. Thus, the 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, rejection has been overcome.

Regarding the rejections under 35. U.S.C. 103(a) to Claims 24-29

As defined in amended independent Claim 24, Claim 24 defines a transfer mechanism for transferring a disk shaped object to be processed. In particular, the transfer mechanism includes a common transfer chamber divided into an upper space and a lower space by a partition wall which has a guide slit allowing horizontal movement of a supporting part, and the guide slit allows a gas to flow from the upper space to the lower space therethrough. That is, the upper space is in communication with the lower space through the guide slit. (See Applicants' Figure 3, element 102 for one example of such a guide slit.) In this configuration, by allowing a gas, for example, an inactive gas to flow through the main transfer chamber, the partial pressure of impurities (a gaseous component generated from the molded member and the like) therein, which is generated during the evacuation of the main transfer chamber, can be decreased.

In contrast, Kitsunai discusses that the lower space 19 is air-tightly sealed and thus, the lower space 19 is not in communication with the upper space. See paragraph [0016] and Figs. 3, 4 and 7 of Kitsunai. Accordingly, the teachings of the Kitsunai are completely different from that of Claim 24.

Further, Hughes does not alleviate these deficiencies of Kitsunai.

As stated above, the prior art references do not show, independently or in combination, the inventive features of Claim 24. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that independent Claim 24 patentably defines over the applied art references including Hughes and Kitsunai collectively or individually.

Hence, Claim 24 and the claims dependent therefrom are therefore allowable.

Dependent Claim 29, in addition to the inventive features recited in Claim 24, defines that the transfer mechanism further includes a gas supplying unit for supplying an N₂ gas or

an inactive gas to one of the upper or lower spaces in which the holding part is disposed and a gas exhausting unit, installed at the other of the upper or lower spaces in which the holding part is not disposed, for evacuating the common transfer chamber under the vacuum state.

The outstanding Office Action asserts that the features of Claim 29 are disclosed in Figs. 10 and 11 of Miller. However, Figs. 10 and 11 of Miller are totally silent on any gas supplying unit or gas exhausting unit. Indeed, Fig.2 of Miller only shows gas exhausting unit 52 but Miller is totally silent on a gas supplying unit for supplying an N₂ gas or an inactive gas to one of the spaces in which the holding part is disposed.

Therefore, the additional features of Claim 29 are not disclosed or even suggested in Miller. Thus, Claim 29 is allowable for this reason as well as its dependence from independent Claim 24.

Claim 28 has been withdrawn from consideration. However, Claim 28 (which depends from allowable Claim 24) should be rejoined and allowed.

Regarding Newly Added Claim 30

Claim 30, in addition to the inventive features recited in Claim 24, defines that the supporting part vertically extends from the upper space to the lower space through the guide slit. None of the applied art reference teaches, discloses or implies the inventive features of the newly added Claim 30. Accordingly, Claim 30 is also allowable.

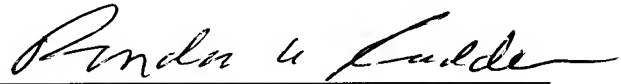
Conclusion

In light of the above discussions, the outstanding grounds for rejection are believed to have been overcome. The application is believed to be in condition for formal allowance.

An early and favorable action to that effect is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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